

# Public Markets & Community-Based Food Systems

Making Them Work  
in Lower-Income  
Neighborhoods



PREPARED FOR:  
The W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Project for Public Spaces, Inc.



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# Introduction

Public markets, and farmers markets in particular, have long served communities as a source of fresh fruits and vegetables. According to a newly-published history of markets public markets in 19<sup>th</sup> century America “were more than just a mere convenience; it was the duty of the state to ensure that the urban populace would have an adequate, wholesome, and affordable supply of necessities....”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, farmers markets not only provided a direct outlet for small farmers to sell their wares, but were often started in order to supply city residents with fresh, nutritious, and affordable food.

Food system advocates have been involved in markets for decades, the most notable early example being the Interfaith Hunger Coalition’s major role in starting farmers markets in Southern California in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. More recently, though, a new generation of food security and local food systems advocates have turned to markets as a proactive measure to address the lack of food choice and poor access to fresh produce in low-income communities. Rather than simply providing emergency food relief, these groups are looking to markets to support and build community food systems and food security.

This report summarizes the results of research conducted to determine how markets undertaken by local food systems advocates can more effectively participate as a part of community-based food systems and address food security in lower-income communities, as well as attain long-term success and sustainability. It is a companion to research completed earlier this year for the Ford Foundation, “Public Markets as a Vehicle for Social Integration and Upward Mobility.” The Ford research is being used to shape a funding program to leverage public markets as a tool for community economic development in neighborhoods undergoing demographic transformation. Together these two reports identify many opportunities for public markets to serve as a positive force in building healthier communities and food systems.

Farmers markets are on the rise in the United States: Between 1994 and 2002, their numbers grew by 79 percent, to well over 3,000 markets. As a result, many urban communities have gained greater access to fresh, affordable food and have become a larger part of the local food system. While success rates for markets nationally are quite high (about 82% according to AMS@USDA 2003 Farmers Market Facts), markets in low-



Fondy Farmers Market, Milwaukee, WI

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Tangires, Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth Century America. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 3.

income neighborhoods – typically food-insecure areas – are notoriously difficult to operate successfully. These markets often fail because basic operating elements necessary to their survival are not considered. A public market is, after all, an economic enterprise.

The operating elements of this particular enterprise, however, are incredibly complex and as such, present many challenges. Our initial survey identified some common issues that local food systems advocates face in operating successful farmers markets, including:

- difficulty in attracting farmers
- insufficient customer base
- inability to meet vendors' financial expectations
- inability of small growers to meet demand
- over-reliance on federal food aid programs/lack of cash sales
- insufficient community buy-in
- difficulty in keeping the market producer-only

Indeed, with all these challenges, it was difficult to find success stories to research! A close look at the above issues, as well as the successes in the field, will allow us to identify how markets can enhance local food systems in terms of economic viability for low-income communities, local food systems advocates, and small farmers.

## Definitions and Scope of Research

As a point of definition, a “food system” generally includes production, processing, distribution, and consumption of food – in short, everything from farm to table. Community-based food systems tend to stress eating seasonal, locally-grown and produced foods. Today, many American consumers' only connection to community-based food systems is through their local farmers market.

There are a number of issues local food system advocates usually address, including: hunger prevention, access to food, nutrition and consumer education, environmental conservation, land-use issues (including farmland preservation), and greater food self-reliance. “Food security,” an especially critical issue in low-income communities, involves five main elements: affordability, accessibility, nutritional value, environmental sensitivity, and cultural responsiveness.<sup>2</sup>

While public markets take a variety of shapes and settings, they are distinguished by three characteristics. First, public markets must have public goals, such as addressing food security in the community, revitalizing a commercial corridor, or encouraging immigrant entrepreneurship. Second, they must be located in a space that is accessible to the community and the general public – a place where people can easily interact and communities can come together. Finally, public markets are comprised of independent, locally-owned and operated businesses.

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<sup>2</sup> Kami Pothukuchi, “Focus on Food Policy Councils,” *The Wisconsin Foodshed* – Department of Urban and Regional Planning. Volume I, Issue 2 (June 1997).



For the purpose of this study, we defined a successful market as one that:

- succeeds in addressing food security issues and building local food systems
- provides a space for people to come together
- is economically sustainable over the long term

Our research began with a survey of 14 markets established or sponsored by local food system advocates. From this list, three were selected for detailed case study research, which included market visits, customer and vendor surveys, and interviews with market managers and sponsors.

One, the **Adams & Vermont Certified Farmers Market** (*see page 11*) was started by the Interfaith Hunger Coalition (IHC) specifically to address food insecurity in South Central Los Angeles. As waves of newcomers migrate into and out of the area, the market has served as a stabilizing force, providing the neighborhood's working poor access to fresh fruits and vegetables for over 20 years. Though it is no longer connected to IHC, Adams & Vermont sustains itself on vendor fees alone, and requires no direct subsidies.

The second market, started by a small group of farmers and now sponsored by the Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee (HTF), has been in operation for over 30 years. Though the **Fondy Farmers Market** (*see page 16*) has changed substantially in that time and is now poised for still more dramatic transformation, it has consistently served the community's need for fresh, affordable food. HTF hopes to build on this successful but underutilized market and extend its reach to address more directly food security issues year-round. The market, which has already expanded its shed space and almost doubled its growers in the past two years, is in a state of flux. Immigrant farmers, mainly from Southeast Asia, are playing a key role in its future.

The **Broad Street Farmers Market**, our third case study (*see page 23*) is sponsored by a local land trust and food systems group, the Southside Community Land Trust (SCLT). Founded in 2002, this Providence, Rhode Island market was established specifically to address food security issues in the neighborhood, but is also closely connected to an incubator business program for immigrant farmers. Broad Street has tried to build in "a sense of place" right from the start, with a highly visible location, cooking demonstrations, music and entertainment, places to sit, and other amenities and attractions. As a result of these efforts and its sensitivity to the surrounding neighborhood's needs, the market has already drawn a fairly wide variety of customers, giving it a good base from which to grow.

While these markets are generally successful, each faces challenges: some fairly common, some unique, but all instructive. An analysis of these challenges will help market sponsors to attend to their own specific goals as well as the more general goals that all markets must address in order to be successful and sustainable. Moreover, it will help them leverage their markets to address broader community development issues and concerns.

This report begins with a presentation of the detailed case studies, followed by an analysis of the impacts of these markets on their communities, vendors, and customers. Finally, a series of lessons learned is presented, along with opportunities for the future development of markets and local food systems in lower-income communities.

# Methodology

The core of this research was based on an analysis of three existing farmers markets (started or operated by local food system advocates) conducted with the goal of understanding the roles they play in building local food systems and in addressing food security issues. As this is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of all potential aspects of these issues, PPS used a case study approach that involved:

- Interviews with market management and sponsors
- Collecting market background and budget information
- Surveys of customers, with a goal of 100 per market (in all, 229 surveys were completed)
- Surveys and interviews with market vendors: While every Broad Street vendor and about half of Fondy's vendors were surveyed, it was more difficult to communicate with Adams-Vermont vendors, and only 15% participated. In all, 41 vendor surveys were completed.



Surveyors at Adams & Vermont Farmers Market, Los Angeles, CA

At the outset, specific criteria for selecting research sites were developed, including markets addressing hunger prevention, access to food, nutrition and consumer education, environmental conservation, land use issues (including farmland preservation), and greater food self-reliance. PPS made an extensive effort to identify potential examples by conducting Internet research, eliciting suggestions through listserves, and interviewing food security experts and market managers across the country. It was from this initial list of 14 markets that we identified our three case studies.

PPS also conducted a review of the existing print and web literature on markets' role in local food systems and in addressing food security. These references are included in Appendix B.

# Case Study Profiles

## Adams & Vermont Certified Farmers Market

LOS ANGELES, CA –



### Introduction

Soon after one o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon, shoppers start lining up in the parking lot of St. Agnes Catholic Church in South Central Los Angeles. By 1:40, well over a hundred people are waiting – Mexican women and their children, African American seniors, West Indian couples – some in the shade of the classroom trailers, others in the blazing sun, 10 feet from the nearest vendors setting up their tents, tables and wares. By 1:50, the crowd is getting impatient, pressing the imaginary boundary between the orange cones marking the entrance to the market. Market manager Roy Edwards controls the crowd easily, holding them back with gentle but firm admonishments. At two o'clock sharp, Roy blows his whistle and the crowd surges forward into the Adams & Vermont Farmers Market, racing towards the greens, oranges, melons and peaches sold by their favorite farmers. Four hours and hundreds of pounds of fresh produce later, the market is over just as quickly as it began. Next week, a similar scene will play itself out in the same parking lot, much as it has for over 20 years.

## History

Until the late 1970's, farmers markets were non-existent in California: Direct marketing by the state's farmers was illegal due to various health and packing regulations. In 1977, though, a bumper crop threw farmers into a financial crisis because they couldn't get fair prices for their wares. This prompted then-Governor Jerry Brown to sign an executive order enabling direct marketing by growers, exempting them from standard produce-packing requirements, and thus opening the door for markets.

The Adams & Vermont Certified Farmers Market, one of the first six such markets in Southern California, grew out of the efforts of the Interfaith Hunger Coalition (IHC), a group of churches and farmers. IHC formed a Hunger Organizing Team to take on the role of creating farmers markets, with the specific goal of improving access to fresh and affordable produce for low-income people. In 1978, the team approached a cluster of churches in Los Angeles about starting markets and received an overwhelmingly positive response. One year later the first market started in Gardena and farmers sold out even before its official scheduled opening.

Other markets were soon organized to build on Gardena's success, including the Adams & Vermont market, which opened in 1980. Most were located on church parking lots and targeted to working poor and lower middle-class residents. Six CETA workers<sup>3</sup> played a major role in getting the markets going, undertaking massive community organizing efforts to build support, find suitable locations, and recruit farmers. As testament to the workers' success, both Gardena and Adams & Vermont are still running today and have been fully self-sustaining, with no operating subsidies, from the very start.

When CETA money dried up in the early 80's, the responsibility of coordinating farmers and supporting new and existing markets fell to the fledgling Southland Farmers Market Association (SFMA). Today, Southland represents 22 certified markets and more than 400 growers around Southern California, providing its members with marketing, advocacy, and self-enforcement programs, among other services. Meanwhile, the Interfaith Hunger Coalition, so crucial to the markets' beginnings, disbanded in the late 1990's amid financial scandals. The market is now sponsored by an independent entity, the Adams & Vermont Advisory Group.

## Location

The market's namesake is its location: the crossroads of West Adams Boulevard and Vermont Avenue in South Central Los Angeles. Though vendors originally set up at another church, they have been using the parking lot of the St. Agnes church for about 20 years. This location is ideal in many ways: it provides a built-in constituency from the church and adjoining school; parking is plentiful; it is located on multiple bus routes; and restrooms are available for both vendors and customers. One drawback, says market manager Ida Edwards, is the lack of space for expansion. On the other hand, she notes that moving would be difficult because of the market's well-established identity. "It has been here for so long, you would lose the atmosphere," she reasons. "Plus, it's hard to find another spot as good."

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<sup>3</sup> The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) was a consolidation of federal jobs programs passed in 1973 under the Carter Administration.

## Management & Operations

The benefits of the market's partnership with the church go beyond location. St. Agnes provides the market with use of the schoolyard, parking lot, and bathrooms rent-free. The church even ends its school day early on Wednesdays so as to facilitate the market's set-up. The market runs without electricity, growers are responsible for their own trash and any maintenance or security issues are taken care of by market managers Roy and Ida. The only operating expenses are city and county fees, an SFMA membership fee, insurance, and staff costs – all told, under \$20,000 annually. As a result of church and SFMA support, the continued critical mass of customers, and the market's low operating expenses, Adams & Vermont has sustained itself throughout its history with stall fees as its only income. Roy and Ida are year-round, part-time employees. Because they are also aloe farmers, who have sold at and managed the market for over 10 years, they lend an additional sense of trust and stability to the whole enterprise. The market's annual gross averages between \$275,000 and \$350,000, or about \$15,000/year per farmer.

## Vendors

Adams & Vermont boasts the most ethnically diverse vendors of all of Los Angeles' farmers markets. About half are Mexican, while the other half is a mix of Whites, African Americans, Asians, and Middle Easterners. The market has remained at around the same size for about 15 years, with some 20 vendors, dropping by four or five vendors in winter. It reached a peak of 22 vendors in 2002. Most growers travel between 60 and 200 miles to get to the market, coming from five counties. There is little attrition at the market because farmers make good money, with hundreds of customers in a short time frame and little competition for produce nearby. Farmers are also used to the location and the tradition of selling there, so they want to stay.



A mixture of organic and non-organic produce is sold, from oranges, peaches, and grapes to more niche products like tomatillos and nopales. A few vendors sell value-added products including honey, baked goods, and aloe products; one retired married couple sells shaved ice and cold drinks. The market's percentage of organic growers has risen recently, to about 20-25% in 2003. While higher prices limit the amount of organic produce sold at the market, some organic growers are less aggressive about pricing at the markets in



lower-income communities when they have additional outlets, such as other markets and restaurants that they sell to at higher volumes or prices.

Generally, vendors are selling at markets full-time, year-round, and are quite successful, grossing on average over \$15,000/year at Adams & Vermont alone. About half of them also have a truck at the Santa Monica Farmers Market, one of the largest and most popular markets in Southern California; the other half may sell at three to four additional markets. Because reality dictates that farmers need to sell at multiple markets in order to make a living, many larger growers send employees to smaller markets like Adams & Vermont. Meanwhile, SFMA is trying to find a new pool of small family farmers to balance the numbers of ever-larger farmers trying to sell at the markets.

## Customers

When the market first opened, the surrounding neighborhood was a mixture of Asians and Hispanics. As older generations moved up the economic ladder and out of the area, a new influx of immigrants replaced them, changing the neighborhood substantially in the last 20 years. It is now comprised mainly of working poor and lower middle-class Latinos – primarily Mexican immigrants, but also including some African Americans and West Indians. Customers reflect these demographics: More than half are Latino and almost a third African American, with smaller numbers of Whites, Asians and West Indians. While hardly an affluent community, customers generally have enough money to make some choices about what food they buy. Mapping of customer zip codes shows that the market draws mostly from neighborhoods within a one- to three-mile radius, but also from pockets as far as five miles away (see Appendix A).



Before opening....

Customer numbers peak at about 2,000 per day during the growing season, and about 700-800 in winter. These numbers are largely dependant on FMNP (Farmers Market Nutrition Program) coupons, which are available from June to December; as well, more than half of the market's



....after opening

shoppers use either WIC or Senior coupons, and about one quarter use food stamps.

## Community Impacts

A fair number of local stores now sell cheap but relatively good quality produce, so food security is no longer as dire an issue as it once was. However, the market, which played no small role in this shift, continues to be a steady source of affordable and nutritious food. Since many California food-stamp recipients still use paper benefits, an EBT system is on hold for now, and the food-stamp redemption rate remains at more than 25%. When the market does go electronic, it will use USDA-approved paper scrip to facilitate the transition for both customer and vendor. Management worries, though, that the stigma attached to lining up each week at the market to receive scrip will discourage many current shoppers who are food-stamp recipients; and that some may stop using the market altogether due to. There is also concern that the additional time involved in using the new form of benefits will lose the market some of the recipients' business completely.

While growers have the option of donating left-over food to individuals or organizations, the market is so busy that there is rarely much left at the end of the day. As a result, there are no food donations, organized or otherwise.

## Future

Today, Adams & Vermont is the only predominantly Hispanic farmers market in Southern California that is successful and continuously operating. While it can likely continue its success of the past 23 years, the market may need to grow as competition increases – a prospect that will certainly be challenging. Harry Brown-Hiegel, one of the market's original organizers who is now on the Adams & Vermont Advisory Team, believes that the market can be improved by making it – and keeping it – attractive for small farmers.



# Fondy Farmers Market

## MILWAUKEE, WI

### Introduction

On a bright Saturday in July, hundreds of customers mill about the Fondy Farmers Market, shopping for squash, greens, and melons, running into neighbors and old friends, and crunching on freshly roasted corn on the cob. They stagger to their cars with garbage bag-sized loads of greens as a Hmong farmer's young son rings up another sale.

The Fondy Farmers Market has served up a steady supply of fresh fruits and vegetables to Milwaukee's near north side for well over 30 years. Taken over by the Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee (HTF) in 2001, the market has become part of a larger plan to revitalize an underserved community's physical and economic health. With its vision of the Fondy Food Center, HTF is expanding on one of a community's greatest assets – in this case, a successful but underutilized farmers market – and using it to help achieve their twin goals of local economic

growth and increased food security. During HTF's short tenure, the market has nearly doubled in size, with more space and growers than ever, but it is still evolving and has numerous challenges to face in the near future.



### History

In the early 1970's, four Wisconsin farmers started selling vegetables out of their trucks in a vacant lot on Milwaukee's near north side. Recognizing the absence of grocery stores and the need for affordable and nutritious food in the neighborhood, the city soon moved the farmers to a nearby site on Fond du Lac Avenue, in the heart of a once vital African American and German commercial district, and across from the city's first Sears store. Three decades later, the market has grown to include about 50 farmers and gardeners, and continues to serve as the community's main source of fresh produce.



Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee, a non-profit advocacy group, has worked throughout the city on food security issues for nearly as long as the market has been around. In 1997, a food assessment study of the zip code around the Fondy Market, one of the poorest in the city, found that residents' access to fresh produce was severely constrained due to the high prices, poor selection, and low quality of fresh produce. Furthermore, more than one third of Milwaukee County's food stamp benefits were going to this same zip code. Rather than simply responding with emergency food provisions, HTF was looking for a more targeted, sustainable solution: thus the idea for the Fondy Food Center – with the existing farmers market at its heart – came to life as part of its strategic plan.

## The Food Center

HTF's vision for the food center includes three major components: an expansion of the farmers market; an adjacent, year-round, indoor market hall; and a commercial incubator kitchen. The entire capital cost for the food center is for \$4.5 million, about one-third of which has been raised from private donations, corporate and foundation support, and some federal funds.

With Phase I of the project completed, the Fondy market now has three new sheds – bringing the total to four – with three fronting on Fond du Lac Avenue. The new sheds have increased the market's visibility and almost doubled the amount of leasable space. With demand for stall space at Fondy high, vendor numbers subsequently leaped from 36 in 2001 to over 70 in 2003. Running Monday through Saturday, the market fields between 10 and 15 vendors on weekdays, and often more than 50 on Saturdays during the growing season. Stalls are prized so much that when a vendor died recently, two relatives showed up the following Monday morning to lease the space.

Phase II of the Food Center is construction of a 22,000 square-foot indoor market hall that will enable Fondy to provide fresh food beyond Wisconsin's five-month growing season. The hall will have enough space for 20 to 30 local vendors who would sell produce, fresh meat, poultry and fish, dairy items, baked goods, prepared foods, flowers, and more. The final phase, the kitchen incubator, will be built inside the original shed (known as "Big Brown") and will provide a place to nurture local entrepreneurs' food-related businesses. It is envisioned that incubator businesses will sell products at Fondy's indoor market and farmers market, as well as other markets around the city. The presumed effect of the indoor market hall and incubator kitchen is to further boost the volume of fresh food consumed in the neighborhood, as well as the income of more small local farmers.

Another part of HTF's strategic plan is a city-wide approach to food security and economic development that includes smaller markets around Milwaukee. To this end, they established the Milwaukee Farmers Market Association, which provides technical assistance and promotional and advocacy services to six smaller farmers markets around the Milwaukee area.

## Location

The Fondy Farmers Market is comprised of four sheds sprawling over a large, triangular block – what amounts to a large, bright spot of activity in a slowly revitalizing commercial corridor.

Older, more established vendors continue to sell in Big Brown at the rear of the property; one farmer and his wife in this shed have sold at Fondy since its inception more than 30 years ago.

The three sheds that front Fond du Lac Avenue house many of the newer, mainly Hmong vendors. One is an older shed that has been renovated and painted to match the new sheds flanking it. On one side of these sheds is a vacant lot, site of the future indoor market hall; on the other side, an abandoned property that the market hopes to secure. An indoor flea market of sorts has been set up in the old Sears building across the street, and down the block is a recently renovated bank, the first in the city owned by an African-American.



With its newly increased visibility, Fondy has the potential to be an anchor presence along this revitalizing corridor. The market has received a grant that will allow it to partner with a local arts college to create new signage for the market along Fond du Lac Avenue, which will complement a new artist-designed bus stop being built on Fond de Lac in

front of the market. Some at the market envision replacing a vacant building adjacent to the bus stop with a small public space with tables and chairs, providing a place for customers and the community to meet, talk, eat or relax.

## Management & Operations

While the market itself has remained fairly stable over the years, its management has changed hands a number of times. Befitting the market's spontaneous beginnings, Fondy was initially self-managed by a group of farmers organized as the Milwaukee Farmers Market Cooperative. In the mid 1980's, though, after building two large sheds to accommodate the growing market, the city briefly took over, calling it the City of Milwaukee Greenmarket. After struggling with staffing, farmer recruitment and fiscal issues, the market was returned to the cooperative after less than two years.

In 1997, following its strategic plan, HTF began feasibility studies regarding taking over the market from the cooperative, which wanted to be rid of its management burden. By 2001 HTF had assumed management of the market, which was firmly part of its food center plan. In October, 2003, the market came under the management of the Fondy Food Center, a non-profit established by HTF to run the farmers market, indoor market hall, and kitchen incubator. Farmers from the coop maintain two seats on the board, ensuring they retain a voice in matters of management.

Staff is fairly small at Fondy, but will need to grow once the indoor market is built – one of the challenges for which management needs to plan well in advance. Currently staff is comprised of one full-time general manager of the Fondy Food Center and two seasonal farmers market managers (one full-time and one part-time) who handle most vendor issues, as well as maintenance, custodial, and security tasks. While the general manager’s salary is fully subsidized by United Way, WHEDA, and the Cobalt Corporation, seasonal staff is funded mainly through stall fees. With some of this funding running out at the end of the year, the market has to routinely search for new grants to help fund operating costs. Its annual operating budget is lean for its size, coming in at under \$130,000, which is mostly directed to staff expenses, insurance, utilities, and special events. Fondy also has the support of three to five neighborhood residents who volunteer for about five hours each a week, helping with programming, parking and other issues.

## Vendors

Approximately 70% of the vendors at Fondy are farmers – the market does not distinguish between those with urban or rural plots – and they travel anywhere from three to 300 miles to sell at the market. Many of the vendors are immigrants who farmed in their country of origin and, though they now grow on small urban plots, don’t consider themselves “gardeners”. Among immigrants, some of whom recently bought farms nearby and sell at numerous markets,



comprise about 70% of all vendors at Fondy. The other 30% is made up of White, African-American, Jamaican, Latino and Filipino vendors.

Close to 42% of the farmers sell full-time (six days per week) during peak season and another 33% sell full-time at multiple markets in the area. Generally, they do extremely well, with the more established full-time farmers averaging about \$25,000 in annual sales

and part-timers averaging closer to \$10,000. Despite this level of success, stall fees are fairly low: farmers pay only \$425 annually for each ten-foot stall (\$575 for a corner stall), which includes a shelter, back-in parking spot, display area, electricity and water, and security.

About 30% of the vendors at Fondy sell non-food and prepared food items ranging from natural soaps, skin-care products, and African American fabrics to shaved ice and eggrolls. Distributed throughout the market, these vendors pay \$25 a day.



Fondy's high redemption rate of FMNP coupons (it receives 89% of the FMNP coupons redeemed in all of Milwaukee) ensures most farmers a steady income and, as mentioned earlier, creates a high demand for stalls. In fact, it is not unusual for Karen Harris, Fondy's general manager, to fend off inquiries from Iowa and Michigan farmers looking to cash in at Fondy. Aside of the regulatory issue of out-of-state farmers benefiting from this state-supported program, the market's slogan is "Wisconsin Grown," and though a limited amount of out-of-state produce is sold there, all vendors must be from Wisconsin.

The reselling of out-of-state produce has become a challenge for Fondy's managers, though. Three years ago the Farmers Co-op decided to allow out-of-state produce into the market in order to help some of the smaller vendors trying to fulfill the needs of customers. Since Wisconsin's FMNP rules prohibit out-of-state sales, this policy forces management into an enforcement role to ensure that FMNP coupons are not being used for non-local produce; it also undermines some customers' trust in buying food directly from its producers, a central tenet at most farmers markets. To its credit, Fondy is looking into revising the rules in the near future.

After a five-year long decline in food stamp redemptions at Fondy, they are poised to become a growing source of income for vendors. The state of Wisconsin converted to electronic benefits in 2000, but since there was no system in place for farmers to accept anything but paper food stamps, redemption rates at markets plummeted. Fondy's vendors, who were used to between 40-50% of their customers using food



The Corn Man: "Have roaster, will travel."

stamps, were particularly hard hit and many of the farmers now have zero food stamp business. Currently, only about 10% of customers at Fondy are using food stamps at the market. A program piloted in the summer of 2003, though, will help boost that number. This USDA-supported program enabled five farmers to acquire handheld Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) machines and be trained to use them. The EBT machines automatically debit a food stamp recipient's account when they buy produce at the market with their "Quest" card, and deposit that amount into the farmer's bank account. Initial progress reports on the program are positive, with more redemptions occurring each week and growing interest from other farmers.



## Customers

In a city long segregated by race, the market is the most diverse and integrated place around, with large numbers of African-American customers from the immediate neighborhood, Hmong customers from neighboring communities, and Whites and others from outlying areas. About 77% of Fondy's customers are African-American, 14%

White, and 6% Asian, ranging from very low-income to suburban middle class. The market draws most heavily from the neighborhoods within a three-mile radius, but substantial numbers come from as far as 7 miles north of the market, a sign of a healthy customer base (see Appendix A). Drawn by the market's well-established identity and its ability to provide the "market experience," these "destination" shoppers are crucial to its success.

Women predominate at Fondy, accounting for 7 out of every 10 shoppers, a figure attributable to the market's 47% FMNP coupon redemption rate. This rate includes the senior coupon program, and helps account for the nearly 30% of market customers who are over the age of 55.

## Community Impacts

The market is clearly providing the community with access to fresh and affordable produce: In 2002, over 750,000 pounds of food was sold through the market in both cash and coupons, and another 10,000 lbs of leftover produce was distributed through HTF to food banks, and to neighborhood residents on an informal basis.

## The Future

Fondy Food Center is considering a number of new programs to further its role in building the local food system and expanding the reach of the farmers market. One possibility is to work with a local Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) coordinator to use the market as a distribution point for CSA farmers, which could help to boost CSA subscriptions, farmer income, and patronage at the market. A donation of 30 acres of mature farmland to HTF from a prison program experiencing budget cuts is pending, and HTF is looking into making the land available to some of their farmers. An incubator farm program, which would allow some farmers to boost their output and grow their business, is another possibility. HTF is also exploring a youth gardening program whereby teens would sell produce they grow on urban farms at Fondy and other markets. Finally, the market is in negotiations with a county transit system for one of its decommissioned buses, which could be used for a mobile farmers market that could serve various senior citizen housing complexes.

Despite the fundraising challenges that lie ahead, Fondy is well positioned for success. The market has built up generations of good will, a broad base of customers, and widespread support among private foundations and donors, as well as from governmental agencies. If they pull off their goal of creating what is, essentially, a community center for food, HTF and the Fondy Food Center could help catalyze more investment and revitalization in the community, all the while building and supporting the local and regional food system.



# Broad Street Farmers Market

PROVIDENCE, RI



## History

Southside Community Land Trust (SCLT), a community gardening organization since 1981 and sponsor of the Broad Street market, began bouncing around the idea of a farmers market in 1997. Having helped transform a dozen vacant lots into community gardens and de facto neighborhood open spaces, SCLT believed that a market could extend their ability to address food security in the low-income area of south Providence. With few large supermarkets in the area, and the smaller grocery stores selling poor-quality produce at relatively high prices, south Providence has long been considered food insecure. While the gardens provided a few residents and their families with locally grown organic produce, a farmers market would bring fresh food to the broader community, while simultaneously providing an outlet for sales by neighborhood farmers.

After a few years of planning and partnership-building, the market came into fruition in July of 2002. Saturday mornings from 9am to 1pm, from mid-July to October, six farmers and urban gardeners sell fruits and vegetables, herbs, cut flowers, nursery stock and some value-added products. Additionally, SCLT sells produce from CityFarm, its own half-acre community garden. The market was supported mainly by low-income Latino residents drawn by the fresh, affordable produce, as well some residents of surrounding neighborhoods.

## Urban Edge Farm

At the same time that it was getting the farmers market off the ground, SCLT realized that some of the area's community gardeners, many of them Hmong farmers from Laos who had been selling their produce to restaurants, small grocery stores, and neighbors, had run out of space to expand their operations. SCLT, realizing the economic benefits for these urban agricultural entrepreneurs, and the potential boon for the neighborhood as well, began searching for more land for the farmers. During 2002, SCLT worked to complete a deal with the State Division of Agriculture to acquire a 50-acre parcel of farmland eight miles outside Providence in the city of Cranston. The governor of Rhode Island ultimately helped secure the land, along with the Nature Conservancy and the City of Cranston, and offered it to SCLT for an incubator farm. The deal closed in the fall of 2002, with SCLT signing a four-year lease with the state for \$1/year, with an option to buy in the fifth year for \$1. "Urban Edge Farm" came into being, with the goal of helping to support the farmers as well as the fledgling Broad Street market.



SCLT recruited two Hmong, one Cambodian and one Nigerian to be incubator farmers on the land during its first year. The selected farmers all had significant agricultural experience going into the program, but SCLT gave them additional training in sustainable growing practices, as well as in business and marketing strategies. Each incubator farmer gets one acre of land to farm for four years, and is then aided in relocating to his/her own local farm to continue their business. Three of the farmers now sell their organic produce through the market on Saturdays and to

area restaurants throughout the week, while one sells exclusively to restaurants. The farm is large enough to accommodate up to 15 farmers, mainly immigrants with some farming experience, providing them the opportunity to start their own viable agricultural businesses. The remaining land on the farm will be used for establishing a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program and for educational purposes.

## Location

The Broad Street Farmers Market boasts an ideal location, on the front lawn and walkways of the beautiful Georgian-style Algonquin House, owned by the Rhode Island Indian Council. Its white tents are highly visible from the street and there is plenty of space for expansion. The market makes a concerted effort to encourage shoppers to linger at the market, providing shade and seating, hosting cooking demonstrations with local chefs every week, and inviting musicians for entertainment. A second SCLT-staffed table provides market and nutrition information and a space for other local non-profits to do outreach.



## Management & Operations

SCLT funds market staff and operations through an incredible combination of stall fees, market merchandise, produce sales, grants, shared management costs and strong local partnerships. With a lean 2003 operating budget of \$13,100, Broad Street is close to generating enough profits to cover its operating expenses in only its second year. Furthermore, most capital expenditures for the market, including tents, tables, banners, EBT machine, etc. have been paid for by grants. The Americorps

VISTA program helped pay for much of the labor necessary to get the market off the ground, and will continue to subsidize a full-time, seasonal market manager. Additional staff costs, including a CSA coordinator and possible marketing person, may be partially addressed through a restructuring of SCLT staff. An assistant market manager, a local high school student and participant in SCLT's youth gardening program, was funded this year through a grant and the organization is looking to partner with a local summer youth employment program to fund the position in the future.

Other operating expenses – rent, insurance and utilities – are all provided by the Rhode Island Indian Council. Volunteers play a significant role as well, helping with set-up and break-down; staffing the information & merchandise booth; running the cooking demonstrations; coordinating children's activities; and occasionally dressing up in a big vegetable farmer puppet costume. Vendors are responsible for their own trash. Funding for the market beyond this year is scarce, but staff is constantly working on new sources. The stability of Broad Street's parent organization (SCLT) and wide-spread support from local, state and federal agencies (including the City Council, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, and the USDA) are among its greatest assets.

## Vendors

Since the Broad St. market is so new, SCLT has to actively recruit some regular, non-incubator farmers to provide the right mix and volume of products for the community. They hold spring workshops and send out mailings to all farmers in the state who have direct marketed in the past, and receive some support from the state for these activities. While they retained four farmers from 2002, another three left, mostly because of poor sales and a lack of staff. The market alleviates some of these issues with a co-op table that is staffed by SCLT. Farmers who want to sell at the market, but can't afford the low return and/or extra staff, can pay a \$200 annual fee plus 15% of their weekly gross, and then simply drop their produce off at the beginning of market day. Word of mouth about this option began to spread, and there were a few new co-op





farmers for 2003. The market encourages community gardeners to sell at the co-op table, as well, charging them only 15% of their weekly sales, with no annual fee.

Overall, eight vendors sold at six stalls at the market in 2003: three incubator farmers, each with their own table, a farmer from Massachusetts, between 3-6 farmers at the co-op table, and the SCLT CityFarm table. Additionally, there is the weekly cooking demo stall, a merchandise stall where SCLT sells market t-shirts, shopping bags, fridge magnets, etc., and one kids activity/info

table. Regular stalls, including those for incubator farmers, cost \$200/season – a bargain for farmers. As a further incentive for farmers to sell through the entire season, half of their annual fee is refunded if they attend regularly.

## Customers

With just one supermarket within five miles of the market (a recently-opened Stop & Shop), Broad St. serves as a significant source of fresh produce for the community. Most people can only shop at bodegas and mom & pops during the week, so Saturday mornings at the market are usually well-attended. Most of Broad St.'s customers are from the neighborhood and are low-income, though a substantial number of shoppers come from surrounding neighborhoods and outlying suburban areas as well. Accordingly, customer ethnicity is fairly diverse, with about 60% Latinos, substantial numbers of Asians and West Africans, and smaller numbers of Whites and African Americans. In 2002, customers were also primarily Latino, but the addition of niche ethnic products – bok choy, mustard greens, garden egg, jute leaf, etc. – has drawn new business from the West African and Southeast Asian communities nearby. An increase in the number of White customers has occurred since last year as well, as word of Broad Street's unique product mix and diverse atmosphere gets out.

About 60% of the market's customers use WIC coupons through the USDA's Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). As at most markets, food stamp redemption is relatively low



compared to the coupons. An EBT system piloted at Broad St this year enabled a small percentage of shoppers to utilize food stamps (via Quest cards) at the market, and the redemption rate will likely increase as food stamp recipients become more used to the system. Like many markets in lower-income communities where a large percentage of customers use WIC coupons, women outnumber men at Broad St. almost three to one.

## Community Impacts

Another example of SCLT's ability to share resources is evident in the unique partnership between CityFarm, the organization's three-quarter acre certified organic farm, and a nearby soup kitchen. In addition to selling produce at the market to help cover operating costs, CityFarm donates over 100 pounds of produce to area food banks and soup kitchens each week. In return for fresh produce, the soup kitchen and shelter, Amos House, provides CityFarm the use of their kitchen to process herb-vinegars, lip balms, moisturizers, and other value-added products. These products are then sold at the market to raise funds for CityFarm, which can then grow additional produce, thus completing the cycle.



## Future

SCLT has already recruited a second cohort of incubator farmers for the 2004 market season, including a Vietnamese woman, a Mexican man, and a cooperative of four Latin American entrepreneurs. Market staff is also working to recruit more established farmers to fill the gaps in their product mix and boost volume. To realize more of Urban Edge Farm's potential and further expand the south side's access to fresh produce, SCLT is establishing a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program targeted to

lower-income residents. Illustrating the interconnectedness of the market, its social agenda, and the community, incubator farmers will grow produce for the CSA, and shares will be distributed weekly at the market.

Broad Street's combination of location, diverse vendors and product mix, programming, and social mission creates a considerable amount of positive energy, and generates support from the community and beyond.



# Impacts of Case Study Markets

The surveys of customers and vendors conducted at the three case-study markets yielded much useful information about how these markets were impacting local food systems. The markets are particularly strong in their ability to improve access to fresh food for customers who otherwise have few options in their neighborhoods and limited resources. For vendors, especially new immigrants with agricultural backgrounds, the markets provide opportunities to create a new business and supplement their income, while increasing demand for locally grown products. The markets are also positive economic and social forces for their surrounding urban and rural communities, although more can be done to realize their full potential. Finally, the case studies offer lessons in how sponsors can balance their social agendas and the practicalities of sustaining a complex business enterprise.

## Customer Impacts

### Accessibility to Fresh and Affordable Food

In each of the three case studies, the community surrounding the market has been food-insecure for decades. While each neighborhood has seen the recent addition of a small number of grocery stores and supermarkets in their trade areas, fresh food is still not as readily available as in more affluent areas. In South Central Los Angeles, discount produce stores have created noticeable competition for the market in the last few years, but will likely never match the quality and sheer variety that customers can find at the market. Indeed, 63% of Adams & Vermont customers, and 79% of overall customers, agreed that they shopped at the market because it has better quality produce than the stores in their neighborhood.

An even clearer picture emerged from the unsolicited responses to the question: “What is the greatest benefit of the market to the community?” By far the most common responses (41.4%) relate specifically to the freshness and quality of the produce, and to its health benefits for community members. Additionally, 23% of the responses mentioned locally-grown products as the market’s greatest benefit to the community; and overall, 78% of customers either “somewhat agreed” (23%) or “strongly agreed” (55%) that they shopped at the market because the products are locally grown.

Another major advantage of markets over local stores is the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). It cannot be underestimated how important FMNP’s WIC and senior coupons are to improving





access to fresh fruits and vegetables in these communities. The studied markets all have FMNP coupon redemption rates over 50%, with the Broad Street market the highest at around 60% (according to management). Ironically, Broad Street also has the smallest number of senior-age shoppers among the markets studied (about 4% compared to 13% at Fondy and Adams & Vermont), which could be the result of a lack of state funding for Rhode Island's FMNP Senior coupon program in 2003.

Food stamp usage, as at most farmers markets right now, is relatively low. Redemption rates dropped substantially in the past few years when benefits began to be distributed electronically, and many markets were left with no viable system for redeeming food stamps. Each of the case study markets piloted EBT systems in the summer of 2003 – in fact, all three were the first in their states to do so – in the hopes of drawing food stamp recipients back to the markets. Both Broad Street and Fondy's pilot programs met with a small amount of success, and as customers become familiar with the system, and awareness spreads of its use at markets, the redemption rate should rise again. The Adams & Vermont market would have used its newly acquired EBT machine, except that customers routinely showed up with paper food stamps. Apparently, the state of California has not had much success in transitioning to electronic benefits; hence, Los Angeles' Adams & Vermont Market maintains a current redemption rate of well over 25%.



Customer surveys show some correlation between users of FMNP coupons and food stamps and the degree to which the market addresses their food needs: Among those customers using coupons, 36.8% said they were eating fruits and vegetables “much more than before” as a result of shopping at the market, compared to 22.8% of non-coupon shoppers. Overall, 55.7% of market shoppers boasted eating fruits and vegetables either “somewhat more” or “much more” as a result of shopping at the market, a clear indication of these markets' success in improving access to healthy food.

Furthermore, in strict terms of the markets' overall ability to provide food, 46.6% of all customers said that they were able to provide “somewhat more” or “much more” food for their families as a result of shopping at the market.

Finally, each of the case study markets has three elements crucial to improving a community's access to food: a high-traffic location, good transit access, and ample parking. The markets are all located on major arterials, making them easy to get to on foot, or by car or transit. While parking efficiency can always be improved, each of the markets has enough parking to enable customers to drive there and load up their cars with fresh vegetables for the week. With car ownership rates in low-income neighborhoods substantially lower than in more affluent areas, though, convenient transit access to the market is necessary. Again, each case study market fared

well in this regard, with locations served by multiple bus routes. In the case of Fondy, a new, artist-designed bus stop will soon figure prominently in front of the market. Overall, 77% of customers agreed that they shopped at the market because it is convenient. And, in unsolicited responses, 23% of customers rated the markets' convenience as the greatest benefit to their community.

## Affordability

In terms of affordability, the case study markets still seem to have a leg up on what little competition there is. In unsolicited responses to the question "What is the greatest benefit of the market to the community?" 22% of customers mentioned price. Furthermore, over 70% of customers agreed that they shopped at the market because it has better prices than the stores in their neighborhood. Again, the exception to this was the Adams & Vermont Market where, as mentioned before, discount produce outlets have opened nearby in the past few years. Still, 50% of their customers agreed that the market has better prices.

## Hunger Prevention

Both the Broad Street and Fondy markets have close connections to emergency food providers. Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee, Fondy's sponsor, counts hunger prevention as central to its mission, coordinating emergency food donations to a wide network of food pantries, meal programs, and shelters. The market supports these efforts by donating about 10,000 pounds of leftover produce to food banks annually. SCLT, the Broad Street market's sponsor, leverages its weekly donation of produce to a local soup kitchen and shelter, to receive time in the kitchen to manufacture value-added products. These products are then sold at the market, with proceeds going back into the food donation program.

## Nutrition and Health Education

A crucial component of any market serving a low-income neighborhood is educational outreach to customers who often have had scarce access to fresh produce. Many of these customers may be unfamiliar with the preparation and health benefits of fresh, local and /or organic products. As part of its community outreach programs, the California Department of Health Services conducts a monthly nutrition education program at the Adams & Vermont Market. Other markets,



including Fondy and Broad Street, sponsor regular cooking demonstrations for customers looking for quick, new and tasty ways to prepare market produce. Finally, some markets – Broad Street being the most notable example here – staff a table at the market with nutrition and health-related information for customers, ranging from recipes that use market produce to updates on FMNP coupon and food-stamp benefits.

Consumer education efforts in the last few years have convinced at least some customers to try

organic food. Surveys show that 46.6% of all shoppers, 42.7% of FMNP coupon users, and 43% of food stamp users said they were eating “somewhat more” or “much more” organic food as a result of shopping at the market. Clearly, the small numbers of organic growers are successfully introducing substantial numbers of customers to organic produce. Harry Brown-Hiegel of Adams & Vermont believes that customer education is probably the biggest obstacle to growing this segment of markets even more.

## Cultural Responsiveness

A common element at all three of the case study markets is a product mix that reflects the racial and cultural diversity of its customers. Adams & Vermont, which serves a primarily Latino clientele, along with many African Americans, Whites, West Indians, and Asians, has an incredibly diverse group of growers which almost directly reflects the customers’ ethnicities. The market’s product mix reflects this, too, so that Mexican specialties such as nopales, tomatillos, and chilies are offered alongside more “typical” California produce like oranges, grapes, and melons. Fondy and Broad Street also have vendors who sell niche ethnic products, mainly Hmong vendors growing Asian produce. Customers are clearly taking advantage of these products: 44% either “somewhat” or “strongly” agreed that they are eating more food from their culture or background as a result of shopping at the market. Moreover, in addition to drawing customers from the ethnicities they reflect, niche ethnic products also increasingly attract food-savvy and adventurous shoppers, regardless of their ethnicity.

## Social Integration and Sense of Place

The case study markets in this report are meeting many of their social goals: improving community access to fresh and affordable food, providing an outlet for local growers to sell their wares, and building local food systems. There is a danger, however, that in focusing so exclusively on a social agenda, these markets may miss out on a crucial element of success: making a market into a true community place. In our research for the Ford Foundation, we found that public markets deemed successful – socially and economically, as well as in terms of community benefits and long-term sustainability – were those that have a strong sense of place.

As in many low- and moderate-income communities, the case study markets are usually among the most socially integrated places in their neighborhoods. However, while both customers and vendors are racially, ethnically and socio-economically diverse at these markets, there is little actual social integration going on. For example, the Adams & Vermont and Fondy markets lack seating or central gathering areas for customers. Especially at Adams & Vermont, little is done to encourage shoppers to linger: There are few, if any, programmed events or activities, and many customers tend to rush in, shop, and leave. Both markets also lack substantial signage announcing their presence, though Fondy is working on this issue with a local arts college. Tellingly, only 10% of customers at these markets self-selected “place” as the greatest benefit to the community. In contrast, 28% of the customers from our previous Ford research chose “place” as the greatest benefit of their markets. One of the most frequent comments coming out of those markets was that they provided “a place for people to come together.” This type of comment was rarely heard from Fondy and Adams & Vermont’s customers.

Overall, 18% of the customers in this report's case study markets self-selected "place" as the greatest benefit of the market to the community. To be fair, these markets were specifically chosen because of their success in addressing food security, so it should come as no surprise that customers did not rate "place" as high as they did "freshness" (which they did 41% of the time). And generally, both Fondy and Broad Street rate well when it comes to positive social atmosphere: 95% of Broad Street's customers and 82% of Fondy's agreed that they shop at the market because of its "positive social atmosphere." Even Adams & Vermont's customers agreed with this 61% of the time. This follows with farmers markets' almost inherent nature for creating vital and positive public places.

Newer markets such as Broad Street seem to have understood this from the start and made efforts to build on the natural social energy of markets. By regularly programming activities and community events at the market, Broad Street manages to draw customers from outside of the immediate neighborhood – a capability, as mentioned earlier, that is crucial to a market's success.

Newer markets such as Broad Street seem to have understood this from the start and have made efforts to build on the natural social energy of markets. By regularly programming activities and community events at the market (among other reasons), Broad Street manages to draw customers from outside of their immediate neighborhood – a capability, as mentioned earlier, that is crucial to a market's success.



Chinatown Night Market – San Francisco, CA



# Vendor Impacts

The surveys and interviews sought to understand the impact the markets were having on vendors in terms of family income and business start-up opportunities. Since a large number of vendors at both Fondy and Broad Street markets are new – having sold at markets for less than two years – it is somewhat difficult to gauge overall how successful the farmers are. At Fondy, about half of the vendors, mainly Hmong farmers, are recent additions to the market, and at Broad Street, the three incubator farmers are new to the market, this year. To capture the impacts in a more qualitative way, therefore, we created two profiles of vendors at Broad Street and Fondy, which provide insight into how the market is not just a family business enterprise, but provides an opportunity for them to express and support their culture and ethnic communities.

## *Vendor Profiles*

### Chang Xiong, Broad Street Farmers Market<sup>4</sup>

Saturday mornings, from July to November, Chang Xiong sets up a tent and table and arranges her baskets of organically grown Asian produce and flowers at the Broad Street Farmers Market. Though Chang is a first year incubator farmer at the market, she is by no means a rookie. In her native country of Laos, Chang grew rice, corn, cucumbers, zucchini, sugar cane, and other crops on about 15 acres with her husband Ger (or George, as he's called most of the time).

After emigrating to the United States with Ger in 1976 from a refugee camp in Thailand, Chang and her family were among the first Hmong to organize a community garden in Cranston, Rhode Island. Last year, Chang's brother-in-law and fellow farmer Choua attended a presentation on the incubator program at a Hmong United Association meeting. Soon thereafter, both Chang and Choua were enrolled.

Chang's crops at the incubator farm include bitter melon, Thai basil, mustard greens, and Hmong corn. Like many farmers market vendors, Chang relies on her family to help with the business, and her youngest two daughters lend a hand both at the farm and the market (Ger now works for the Providence Police Department). Chang enjoys growing and selling at the market, "so customers can meet the people that grow their food and can depend on good vegetables," she says.

Before becoming an incubator farmer, "We mostly grew produce just for our family," Chang says, "but now that we are at Urban Edge Farm, we have a big place to grow food for the whole Hmong community."

### Tony Moua, Fondy Farmers Market

Tony Moua, a vendor at the Fondy Farmers Market, is originally from Laos, where his mother and father were farmers. Like many Hmong during and following the Vietnam War, Tony's

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<sup>4</sup> Profile information provided by Devan Chase, incubator farm coordinator for Broad Street Market.

family was displaced from their home and fled the country. In 1975, they moved to the United States: first Washington DC, then California, and finally, about 15 years ago, they settled in Milwaukee.

About 10 years ago, a friend of Tony's told him about selling opportunities at farmers markets. He also remembers his dad saying that people in Milwaukee did not have enough fresh produce to feed their families. Tony's own family and other Hmong families needed food as well. He began looking into farming, since the job market was not very good at the time anyway, and he had already learned a lot about farming from his parents.

The first step, obviously, was to get some land, so Tony leased about 2 ½ acres from a farmer in Racine, about 30 minutes outside Milwaukee. Next, he ordered seeds and started growing. He chose to sell at Fondy because it was the biggest market with the most customers, and he was soon selling there six days a week. By his third year, Tony was working more than four acres, growing all kinds of vegetables including bell peppers, hot peppers, tomatoes, cilantro, acorn squash, zucchini, and pumpkins, as well as Asian produce like mustard greens, bok choy, and kang kung. This year, the farmer from whom Tony leases may sell the land, in which case he will need to find another place to grow.

In order to support his wife and three children, Tony sells produce at Fondy and three other farmers markets in Milwaukee, in addition to working a full-time factory job. "There is a lot of work to do in the fields," Tony says, "and working all these jobs was hard at first, but I got used to it after a few months." He also cut back his selling days at Fondy from six days each week to just Saturdays, the market's busiest day.

Though Tony plans to continue selling at Fondy, he is not entirely happy with the situation at the market. As a veteran grower, he believes that the policy allowing the reselling of out-of-state produce is in direct contradiction with the market's "Wisconsin Grown" theme. The solution he advocates is fairly simple: Revise the rules in favor of locally grown produce once again, and step up enforcement. If Tony's past determination is any indication, the market may very well soon heed his words.

## Income

Vendors were asked to describe themselves by "type of vendor." Among those surveyed from Fondy, 75% said they were full-time market vendors, with 42% selling exclusively at Fondy and 33% at other farmers markets as well. The Adams & Vermont managers disclosed that all of their growers would be considered full-time market vendors; the majority of its growers send their employees to sell at the market, as the owners are selling at other markets on the same day (this gives an indication of the size of farm operations run by Adams & Vermont vendors). In the case of Broad Street, all of the farmers sell at additional markets around Providence.

Only about 10% of growers at Fondy relied on farming for the majority of their household income, despite their largely full-time status; the bulk of them (55%) relied on farming for 11-50% of their income; and 38% relied on markets for more than half of their farm's income.



Broad Street Farmers Market – Providence, RI

These figures indicate that the market, for most, serves as a way of “income patching” rather than as a primary source. This is not the case, however, at Adams & Vermont, where several factors play heavily in the farmers’ favor, including a much longer growing season, year-round markets, and additional sales at hugely profitable venues like the Santa Monica Farmers Market.

The use of the market for “income patching” is supported by other data as well. Using a variety of previously identified upward mobility indicators, we asked vendors what being a market vendor has

allowed them to do. Among Fondy vendors, 74% said “pay rent/bills”; 37.5% said “save/have supplemental income”; 31% said “send kids to college”; about 16% each said “take a vacation” and “buy a car”; and 9% each said “buy a house” and “pay for own education.” From these numbers, it seems that Fondy vendors are making a living, but fewer are able to make serious upward mobility gains (such as sending kids to college.) This is similar to the findings of the earlier Ford Foundation research.

## Business Opportunities and Start-Up

Two of the most interesting findings from the Ford research were the low start-up cost for market businesses, and the sources from which vendors got their start-up funds. In that study, 83% of vendors financed their start-up costs with their own savings – probably because start-up costs were so low to begin with: initial costs were below \$1,000 for 83% of vendors. Figures from the Fondy and Broad Street markets were similar, with 71% and 75%, respectively, of total vendors using their own savings to fund their businesses at the market. Start-up costs were not quite as low at Fondy and Broad Street as in the markets included in the Ford research (which included a number of flea markets, where start-up costs are extremely low); nevertheless, 43% of vendors had start-up costs lower than \$1,000.

One area where these markets are clearly succeeding is in terms of providing business opportunities for immigrants, whether recent arrivals to the United States or otherwise. Immigrants make up over half of all the case study vendors, and many of them have previous agricultural experience. The majority of them (specifically at Fondy and Broad Street) are Hmong, but there are large numbers of Latino immigrants as well. At Adams & Vermont, for example, a Mexican immigrant who used to work for another grower now has his own farm and sells at multiple markets. The incubator farm program at Broad Street, now starting its second year, has enrolled two Hmong, a Nigerian, and five Latino farmers. New York State has two similar programs for immigrant farmers – the New Farmer Development Project and New Farmers, New Markets – which recruit, train and support immigrants interested in starting an agricultural business. Moreover, Fondy Food Center hopes to provide space for 20-30 new small businesses in their proposed indoor market hall, and its planned kitchen incubator will provide opportunities for low-income and immigrant entrepreneurs.





Adams & Vermont Farmers Market – Los Angeles, CA

## Growing Practices

Recent surveys by Cornell University and the USDA found that close to a quarter of organic farmers in the U.S. use direct marketing, including farmers markets, as their main sales outlet.<sup>5</sup> Most vendors at the case study markets, though, while small-scale, are growing in more conventional ways.

Most vendors at the case study markets grow on a small scale, but in conventional ways. Low consumer demand for organic produce, and the perceived (and often real) difference in the price of these products limits the number of organic growers. At Adams & Vermont, though, the percentage of organic growers has risen to about 20-25% in 2003. To offset lower-income shoppers' reluctance to buy organic produce, some growers have eased market prices by selling to other outlets (e.g. restaurants or schools) at higher volumes or prices. CityFarm, SCLT's urban farm in Providence, grows and sells organic produce for the market, and

SCLT trains all of its community gardeners and incubator farmers that sell at the market to grow organically, as well. Fondy Market also has a low percentage of organic growers – again, likely a reflection of consumer demand – but increases in the number of small urban farmers appear to have boosted that percentage somewhat.

Certified farmers markets in California have strict producer-only regulations, so all of the produce sold at markets there, including at Adams & Vermont, can be considered local (though some might come from as far as 300 miles away). At Broad Street, the Urban Edge Farm's incubator growers in Cranston are local, and though the one larger grower is from out of state (Massachusetts), he travels from less than 40 miles away. With strong regulations and a growing customer base, these markets can be viable outlets for small farmers.

## Community Impacts

### Spin-off Impacts on Adjacent Neighborhood

The success of markets in the Ford study was also gauged by the amount of “spin-off benefits” they produced – that is, the degree to which the market catalyzed social and economic activity in the surrounding community. This spin-off could take the form of local jobs produced by the market; a boost in surrounding retail business; or support from other local non-profits through profit-sharing. The Chinatown Night Market in San Francisco, for example, is primarily

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/Organic/Questions/orgqa5.htm>

responsible for a 50% increase in restaurant business in the area around the market when it is open.

The case study markets in this report do generate some small spin-off benefits for their surrounding communities. The Broad Street market, for example, donates food to an emergency food program, as does Fondy. The existence of the Adams & Vermont market, much to its vendors' chagrin, provides a weekly venue for illegal vendors who set up shop on the sidewalk outside the market – without the market, those vendors would not be there. The spin-off impacts would be greater, however, if the markets operated longer hours and if there were stronger connections with adjacent uses. For example, at Fondy, a heavily trafficked street separates the market from what little nearby retail exists, and there are few retail stores near the Broad Street Market. There also seems to be little “incubation” happening where market vendors are opening permanent businesses. Fondy has perhaps the greatest immediate potential for producing spin-off benefits, once the indoor market and incubator kitchen construction are constructed.

## Farm Preservation

Much evidence points to farmers markets playing an important role in preserving farmland. Farmers at the 42 Greenmarkets in New York City, for example, lease or own close to 16,000 acres of farmland, with 1,277 acres in farmland protection programs.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the drive behind much of this land being preservation is growing consumer demand for locally grown food. New Farmers, New Markets, a joint program between Greenmarket, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and Dutchess County, New York, was developed at least partially because the farmers markets in the Greenmarket system were running out of farmers.

Markets like Fondy and Broad Street, both of which have recently been given land by their home states, have helped preserve small pockets of arable land close to the city. But, as in New York, the role that new farmers play at these markets will likely have a larger impact in the long run. With its incubator program, SCLT hopes to train immigrant farmers and, after a few years, help them secure land of their own to continue farming. Similarly, many of Fondy's farmers lease land on which they grow their produce for the market and some have become successful enough in the past few years to purchase small farms of their own.

Finally, 81% of customers at the case study markets either “somewhat” or “strongly” agreed that they shopped at the market because it helps support small family farmers. As farmers markets and the demand for locally grown produce grow, the value of and demand for farmland should rise – a small but hopeful sign in the uphill battle against rampant sprawl.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cenyc.org/HTMLGM/maingm.htm>

# Sponsor Impacts

## Broadening of Sponsor Goals

These markets also serve as a vehicle for widening the social mission of the sponsors. At Broad Street, for example, the community gardeners who were selling their wares ran out of growing space and looked to SCLT for help, spurring that organization to seek out a large piece of land. The acquisition of land for the Urban Edge Farm supports SCLT's original goals of land preservation and supporting community gardening; it also supports their mission statement to act "as a catalyst for the other community needs." In this case, the farm and market together create entrepreneurial opportunities for immigrant farmers.

A similar phenomenon is occurring at Fondy. While HTF's key mission is to "prevent and alleviate hunger," the plan for the Food Center, with the market as its heart, puts the organization squarely in the realm of community economic development. This development will support both HTF's original mission, as well as larger goals of health, upward mobility, corridor revitalization, and building social capital.

## Sustainability

While the case study markets were started (or taken over) in order to achieve a specific social agenda, their sponsor organizations manage to look at the markets as distinct entities, not just vehicles for their goals. At their most basic level, markets are economic enterprises, and must meet the financial expectations of both vendors and sponsors. When they neglect to consider this larger imperative, markets can easily become unsustainable and ultimately fail. If the market fails, so does the sponsor, in terms of its primary social agenda. Obviously, the farmers and customers who rely on the market would be failed then, as well.

Two key factors in the sustainability of markets are start-up costs and ongoing operating costs. At both the Adams & Vermont and Broad Street markets, organizers had substantial start-up subsidies with which to plan their markets well in advance of opening. At Adams & Vermont, the Hunger Organizing Team planned for the market to be self-sustaining from the start and did not open until they knew it could be. The support of CETA workers to organize this massive effort was crucial. Similarly, though on a somewhat smaller scale, the Broad Street Market has the ongoing support of the Americorps/VISTA program to help it get off the round.

At Fondy, HTF had the benefit of taking over an existing, successful market replete with vendors, stall fees, and a critical mass of loyal customers. With the impending additions of the indoor market and incubator kitchen, though, HTF is, in a sense, re-creating its market. Fondy is not going to carry any debt for their capital projects – a wise choice for any market – so construction of the new components is contingent on full funding being in place.

In terms of operating expenses, all three case study markets manage to keep costs low and utilize the support of well-established and well-connected parent organizations. At Adams & Vermont, the combination of support of both St. Agnes Church and the Southland Farmers Market

Association; the sharing of management costs (managers Roy and Ida Edwards also run the Gardena market); and stall fee revenue enables the market to be sustainable. A crucial yet easily overlooked element is the intense community organizing that went into the market during its first few years, and the fact that the subsidization of those efforts through the CETA program allowed the market to thrive early on. Because of this initial subsidy and continued indirect subsidies (mainly rent), Adams & Vermont has a long-term stability that is all too rare for markets serving lower-income communities.

The Broad Street market is also doing remarkably well from a sustainability standpoint, considering its newness and the number of social programs that are connected to it. Its parent organization, SCLT, keeps a separate operating budget for the market and, like Adams & Vermont, has built strong, long-term partnerships to help keep costs down. Broad Street's multifaceted relationship with the Rhode Island Indian Council has been particularly critical to its success. Like many small, open-air markets, Broad Street has low capital expenditures, and it covers what it needs mainly through grants. The market also has the support of a federal program (in this case, Americorps/VISTA) to help with start-up labor costs. A significant source of revenue comes through stall fees, merchandising, and produce sales at the CityFarm table; and volunteers play an important role, setting up and breaking down, coordinating activities, and generally doing anything they can to support the market.

The Fondy market is in a unique position regarding financial status. Though it relies on a mix of grants, private donations, and stall revenues to cover operating expenses, costs did not rise substantially despite the market's expansion two years ago, and stall fees now pay for a somewhat higher percentage of operating costs. However, a significant challenge will come with a rise in management and attendant operating costs when the indoor market hall and incubator kitchen open. Fondy Food Center management plans to rely mainly on the new stall fees to cover much of this expense. Fortunately, Fondy's rent to the City is just \$1 per year, an indirect subsidy that is nonetheless crucial to its success. The market also has the institutional support of its parent organization (HTF); state support through the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA); broad foundation support (including long-term funding through United Way); the well-cultivated support of individual donors; and finally, a small but dedicated group of regular volunteers. If management can maintain this combination of support, keep future operating costs under control, and perhaps raise stall fees somewhat, then a financially healthy Fondy Food Center will emerge from this essential, though volatile, period of growth.

## Customer Draw

One final, crucial element of sustainability for the case study markets is their ability to draw customers from a wide trade area. All three markets have combined the necessary base constituency from the local community with the patronage of customers from outlying neighborhoods. Whether shoppers are coming for niche ethnic products, the dynamic atmosphere or feel-good vibe, the diversity of the crowd, or simply because they have shopped there for years, these markets are all wise to cultivate broad customer support.

# Lessons Learned

## Role of Farmers Markets in Local Food Systems

Our case studies have shown us that community-based food systems advocates can successfully utilize markets to be the very centerpiece of a local food system, with the market helping to drive customer demand and to catalyze local production. The attendant outcomes on the food system are as follows:

- access to fresh and affordable produce for economically and ethnically diverse communities
- a viable direct marketing outlet for small farmers
- a source of nutrition & health education for customers
- a seasonal source of emergency food to food pantries and soup kitchens
- a catalyst for sustainable growing practices
- a catalyst for preserving farmland
- a catalyst for expanding urban agricultural capabilities

## Elements of success

“Success” as we have defined it here is achieved by carefully and deliberately balancing the social mission of the organization – addressing food security and building local food systems – with the economic realities of markets. It is important to note that what works to support farmers economically are equally important elements of success for the market’s customers and sponsors, in terms of addressing food security, building community-based food systems, and creating a viable, sustainable market. As our three case studies can attest, there is no one right combination, and no market has claimed to get it “all right, all the time,” but there are a number of common elements of success worth emulating:

### Thorough Planning

Food systems advocates often propose markets based on a community’s need for fresh and affordable produce. However, the impetus for starting a market cannot be purely need-based. What is equally important, but rarely assessed, is whether the community that needs a market actually has viability for one. Elements of viability include, but are not limited to: the ability to recruit farmers; the ability to draw customers; and a location that is visible, flexible, and accessible, and that will both benefit from and stimulate the surrounding area.

Fortunately, organizers can improve the viability of their proposed market by doing things right from the start – determining trade area and product mix; recruiting farmers and planning to minimize attrition; securing community buy-in and participation; and building strong partnerships all around. This level of planning requires significant amounts of time and money, but pays off by enabling the market to become self-sustaining earlier, and improving the market’s long-term chances of success.



One key element of this planning is to identify and build on the community's existing assets. In the case of the Fondy Food Center, organizers are wisely piggy-backing on the long-standing success of an existing market, with broad community support, a critical mass of customers, and immediate recognition by local decision makers. At Broad Street, the market is harnessing the entrepreneurial energy of immigrant farmers to advance local economic development, food security, and the market itself. Community assets can also take the form of partnerships with community-based organizations, volunteer support, or a market location near existing retail and/or local transit.

## Subsidized Start-Up Workforce

In the case of the IHC farmers markets in California, organizers were subsidized through the CETA program, a federal jobs program in the 1970's. At Broad Street, the market's parent organization garnered the support of the federal Americorps VISTA service program. Similar start-up funding might be available through the USDA's Community Food Project, an eight-year old granting program which specifically addresses food security issues; city or state service programs; and welfare-to-work programs, among others. An initial subsidy for start-up labor is quite possibly the single best investment food systems advocates undertaking a market can make, as it can enable early success and help minimize large and unsustainable amounts of subsidies in later years.

## Connection with Stable Parent Organization/Sponsor

All of our case study markets had the advantage of a well-established parent organization to help it get off the ground. HTF of Milwaukee, for example, has leveraged its existing connections to help build support for the food center. IHC in Los Angeles similarly used its connections to local churches. As with any good partnership, all parties benefit: the sponsor furthers its social agenda, and the market is able to move towards greater sustainability, meeting customers', vendors', and the community's needs along the way.

## Connection to Community-Based Institutions

This organization may or may not be the same as the primary sponsor. In the case of Adams & Vermont, the community-based partnership is with St. Agnes Catholic Church, who provides the site for the market and much of the market's constituency. At Broad Street, the market is connected with the Rhode Island Indian Council, which helps subsidize rent and other operating expenses, and its main sponsor, SCLT, is well-connected to the community through its community gardens and educational programs. Another model can be found in Washington D.C., where a series of small markets is collectively sponsored and supported by an established food security group, but managed individually by community-based organizations. These partnerships help to facilitate the notion of the market as a place primarily for the community, and to keep local concerns and input at the forefront of the market's development.

## Low Operating Expenses

In terms of operating expenses, all three of our case studies approach them with the same simple philosophy – keep costs low. This is not to say that a market with low operating costs will necessarily be successful, though. Successful markets spend money strategically – enough to ensure that they are well managed – and reduce costs wherever they can. A critical element of doing this is by sharing management costs with sponsors and partners, whether parent organizations or neighborhood institutions, as well as with other markets when possible. Typical shared costs are rent (for both the market and office space), utilities, advertising, and insurance. Other ways to lower costs are by utilizing (a sustainable amount of) volunteers, garnering city support, and requiring vendors to manage their own trash. The most successful market organizers, as at Adams & Vermont, find ways to pare operating costs down to sustainable levels from the beginning.

## Make the Market Work for Small Farmers and Food Entrepreneurs

While markets clearly provide a key outlet for them, small farmers looking to survive in the direct marketing world need to be a resourceful lot. Most farmers at our case study markets sell at multiple markets, and sometimes also to restaurants, grocery stores, and other outlets, in order to survive. Some even have full-time jobs on top of farming. Markets in low-income communities, though, often have difficulty recruiting farmers in the first place. Some farmers may perceive the community in which the market is being developed as dangerous and/or lacking a sufficient customer base. A number of key elements to attracting and retaining farmers emerged from our case studies:

### ➤ FMNP Coupon Program

Our case study markets all have FMNP coupon redemption rates between 50% and 70%, helping provide food security for program participants and a reliable source of income for farmers. As mentioned earlier, the Fondy market has a waiting list of farmers looking to sell there, and has inquiries from out-of-state farmers, many of whom ask specifically about the FMNP program. Needless to say, participation in both the WIC and senior FMNP programs, and a location that can draw on a large number of customers who might use these programs, is a fundamental aspect of success for these markets.

The FMNP program can also be a double-edged sword, though, if markets rely on it so heavily that farmer income hinges largely on its availability. The East New York Farmers Market in Brooklyn, for example, has a coupon redemption rate of over 90%. This past year, the market opened two weeks prior to the coupon program's commencement and had virtually no customers for that time – a blow to both market organizers and to vendors' pocketbooks and morale. Fortunately, once the coupons became available, sales took off. Though they are by no means immune to this effect, our case study markets manage enough cash sales to provide somewhat of a buffer to farmers against the numerous vagaries of coupon availability and federal and state funding levels.

➤ **Pilot EBT Systems**

Because of the turmoil in the past few years as states convert their food stamp benefits to electronic systems, markets with once-high food stamp redemption rates have been left in the lurch. A wide trade area and cash sales at the markets have become increasingly important. Fortunately, each of the case study markets is poised to recapture lost food stamp dollars through the use of EBT machines. While USDA has subsidized each of these pilot programs, numerous obstacles remain, including: the continued use of paper benefits in some areas; the education of food stamp recipients regarding use of benefits at markets; the cost of expanding EBT capability to every farmer at the market; and the cost of training those farmers to use the system.

➤ **Wide Trade Area**

Food systems advocates organizing markets often target a very specific community to be the beneficiary of the market – usually the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the market. Our research for the Ford Foundation however, revealed that the more successful markets in low-income communities were drawing customers from at least 3 miles away (and, for the larger markets, up to 5 to 7 miles away). The RFK Stadium Farmers Market for example, an open-air market in Washington DC, draws from all of the surrounding, mainly low-to middle-income neighborhoods, as well as from nearby wealthier suburbs.

In the case of markets where there are high FMNP coupon rates, this broader trade area provides the market access to both additional coupon users, as well as to the greater aggregate income and cash sales of more affluent areas. While the case study markets for this report drew the majority of their customers from the immediately surrounding areas, they also drew from areas 5 miles out and further.

While this is a far-reaching goal for small markets in urban areas, it is crucial in order for farmers to succeed. The case study markets have managed to do this in a variety of ways. Fondy does it partly through sheer momentum and its well-established identity as the oldest and largest market in Milwaukee; newer Hmong vendors are also attracting Asian customers from outside the neighborhood. Though it has a long way to go in this regard, Broad Street likewise markets niche ethnic products, drawing both Asians and West Africans from the neighborhood, as well as non-resident customers interested in the food. This market also attracts customers with its feel-good social identity, of which the incubator farmers are no small part. Meanwhile, Adams & Vermont's identity as a primarily Latino market helps draw customers from Hispanic neighborhoods further out.

➤ **Connection to Immigrant Farmers**

Supporting immigrant farmers is also a highly effective way of enhancing the viability of markets in low-income communities. Farming and direct marketing via farmers markets and other outlets represents a significant and growing opportunity for immigrants, especially those with agricultural backgrounds. Recent immigrants tend to have a closer connection to fresh food than do low-income Americans: they are more used to growing and/or preparing food for their families, whereas Americans cook less and eat out more. As a result, there is greater demand among immigrant communities for large quantities of fresh produce from their ethnic backgrounds.

All three case studies have a close connection to immigrant farmers. Broad Street's incubator farm program, for example, increases the ability of small farmers and gardeners to grow enough volume and type of produce to meet customers' demands, with an eye toward spurring vendor upward mobility. This program has also helped to preserve farmland that would otherwise have been threatened for development, and to grow food on that land specifically for markets.

Numerous other initiatives, including the Kellogg-supported New American Farmers Initiative (NAFI) already support training and incubating immigrant farmers in the United States. One of the regional programs NAFI supports is the New Farmer Development Project (NFDP), a joint program of Cornell Coop Extension, Dutchess County, NY, and New York City's Greenmarket network. NFDP assists immigrant farmers' entry into the regional food system and provides them direct marketing opportunities through the city's farmer markets. Connecting existing NAFI grantees with food security groups undertaking markets would likely provide mutually beneficial outcomes.

#### ➤ Connection to Urban Gardens

Like the Broad Street market, which has CityFarm and Urban Edge Farm, and perhaps Fondy in the near future, markets undertaken by food system advocates across the country are increasingly incorporating urban gardens and/or small farms close to the city into their food security and market plans. Many of these plans include space for community gardeners and small farmers – often immigrants, but just as often not – to grow food to sell at the market. While this is a relatively new movement, markets have been relying on "market gardens" for centuries. In her history of 19th century markets, Helen Tangires relates the well-known advantages of market gardening to local entrepreneurs:

*In Opportunities for Industry and the Safe Investment of Capital, or A Thousand Chances to Make Money (1859), Freedley argued that "the cultivation of fruits and vegetables, especially in the vicinity of large cities, is, if skillfully managed, almost uniformly a profitable business." Market gardening was an attractive occupation because "the attention of producers is so exclusively devoted to the raising of staples, that the markets of the city are often illy supplied with garden fruit and vegetables." (p. 111)*

By building and nurturing this connection with market gardeners, markets are expanding the food system on a community level, further narrowing the gap that they already bridge between people and the food that they eat.

#### ➤ Reselling

In order to survive the economies of scale, though, many of these smaller growers seek to boost their sales by buying produce from other farmers to resell at the market. Unfortunately, reselling can have the effect of undermining confidence in the farmer-

customer relationship, an element of trust that cannot be underestimated at some markets. The Pike Place Market in Seattle, for example, has a giant sign atop the market that announces: “Meet the Producer,” which is exactly what many people expect when they shop there.

The result of this expectation is that some markets sacrifice the needs of the local urban agriculture community for the distinction of being producer-only, and other markets vice versa. Of our case studies, Adams & Vermont, like all certified farmers markets in California, strictly prohibits reselling, but both Fondy and Broad Street allow it. Fondy, as noted before, is facing some difficulty with its reselling regulations, but this is mainly due to out-of-state produce being resold. Some of Fondy’s smaller farmers, though, buy produce from the larger growers at the market to resell – a more tolerable situation all around: both farmers increase their sales, and customers, in a sense, still get a “producers-only” market. This arrangement, if exclusive of out-of-state farmers, would also facilitate enforcement of re-selling regulations for market management, as all involved parties are present at the market.

As we’ve seen, many farmers who sell at markets in low-income communities often need to also sell at larger, more affluent markets, often on the same day. Unlike at Adams & Vermont, where sales are sufficient enough to cover staffing costs, the Broad Street market has difficulty in recruiting the larger, more established growers who are committed to other markets. This is mainly because of low sales volumes and lower prices for produce, due to customers who often cannot afford the usual prices. Though not technically reselling, Broad Street’s solution to this is to staff a co-op table. This table accommodates multiple growers who drop their produce off to be sold in exchange for an annual fee and percentage of the gross.

## ➤ Other Direct Marketing Opportunities

While markets remain an important part of the direct marketing equation, they are actually becoming less profitable for farmers in some places. Brown-Hiegel of Adams & Vermont notes that farmers markets are proliferating so fast – at least in California – that farmers are being spread too thinly among them; each market has fewer customers and the customer base is not expanding as rapidly as the markets are. This situation is exacerbated by Southern California’s low population density, where a trade area needs to be substantially wider for a market to achieve critical mass than in a denser city. If California is a harbinger of things to come, though, as it often is, market organizers need to work proactively to expand direct marketing opportunities for farmers.

Oftentimes, these potential solutions can directly support community-based food systems advocates’ mission, in addition to boosting farmers’ income. They include: hosting a CSA at the market; developing an indoor market; connecting farmers to restaurants to which they can sell at various price points; partnering with schools and/or other institutions; or sponsoring a mobile farmers market to visit senior housing and others whose access to the market is limited.



## Customer Education

Expanding markets' customer base through health and nutrition education and outreach is a task for which local food system advocates are uniquely positioned to provide. The case study markets all have regular educational components regarding nutrition and the buying and preparing of fresh, local foods, but Broad Street's efforts are the most comprehensive. They include: a health and nutrition information table at the market; regular cooking demos with local chefs; and youth gardening and environmental education programs coordinated by SCLT, the market's parent organization.

Organizers can also work to build health and nutrition issues into comprehensive health/science education in K-12 schools around the market. Better nutrition in schools is one of the most pressing issues facing school administrators today, and markets can provide an effective way of teaching students about the importance of local food systems.

## Strong Sense of Place

Despite the natural social dynamism of markets, truly successful places need to be nurtured and managed. Though the case study markets still have much room to improve their functioning as successful public spaces, they do provide a few examples of this dynamism. At Broad Street, market staff and volunteers program regular cooking demos with local chefs, children's activities, and local musicians, taking advantage of and building on the public square-like setting. From an image-boosting standpoint, a new program at Fondy will train less-experienced vendors in the finer points of displaying and marketing their wares, adding to the overall market's visual appeal. Ironically, at Adams & Vermont, some of the most visible elements of the market are the street vendors outside its gates. While the growers and management see them as a nuisance at best, these vendors actually contribute to the market's sense of place, drawing passerby's attention to the area and adding to its visual and ethnic identity.



# Opportunities for the Future: Expanding the Vision

From the case studies, we have found that food systems advocates face substantial challenges in creating and sustaining successful markets in low-income communities. However, many of them are successfully meeting their goals of improving food security and building community-based food systems. Bruce Saito, who runs the Fresh Food Access program for the Los Angeles Conservation Corps believes that the biggest challenge at this point is starting new markets in areas where food insecurity is still dire— that is, neighborhoods with neither supermarket nor farmers market. Indeed, few successful farmers markets have opened in low-income communities in Southern California in the recent past.

Despite California's recent experience, there is actually a fair amount of momentum from food systems advocates looking to start farmers markets, and organizational money from the USDA's Community Food Projects program, and from other sources, are currently helping new markets get off the ground. Unfortunately, while many of these organizations are receiving direction and support from the food security and community-based food systems side of things, too often they are lacking the same from the market sustainability side.

This section will look at two specific areas of opportunity to improve their sustainability: First, how markets undertaken by local food systems advocates can form strategic partnerships and second, how they can work to improve their functioning as public spaces.

## Building Partnerships

In order to improve their markets' effectiveness, local food systems groups need to look beyond their agenda of tackling food security and building community-based food systems and expand their vision and mission to include larger social and economic goals. In order to do so, market organizers must form partnerships with other neighborhood-based or city-wide organizations with compatible social missions. Our case studies have shown how varied these can be, from Adams & Vermont's connection to St. Agnes Catholic Church, to Broad Street's support from the Rhode Island Indian Council.

One of the most logical fields to which local food systems advocates can look is that of health care agencies, both non- and for-profit, and governmental. With the increasing attention being paid to the issues of poor nutrition and obesity, myriad possibilities exist here for collaboration. On the most basic level, markets could use a partnership with a health-related institution to expand their reach and maximize the effect of their health and nutrition education programs. For example, at the Columbia City Farmers Market in southeast Seattle, market staff conducts nutrition workshops at an adjacent women's health clinic for Southeast Asian and East African immigrants – populations who are in the community, but might be difficult to connect with otherwise. The proximity between the market and clinic facilitates this partnership exponentially. Similar associations can be formed with senior or wellness centers, or any place whose constituency and mission overlaps with that of the market.

Markets can also look to partner with organizations with “deep pockets” – those that have sufficient financial resources to help sustain the market in the long term, and would benefit from the association themselves. These could be local universities with public health programs, or community development goals for their surrounding neighborhoods; Business Improvement Districts (BID’s) involved in commercial corridor revival; transit agencies which are interested in improving customers’ experiences facilities at major facilities; and so on. As our case studies have shown us, these pockets do not necessarily need to be filled with cash, but could include space for the market, entrepreneurial training, donation of farmland, etc.

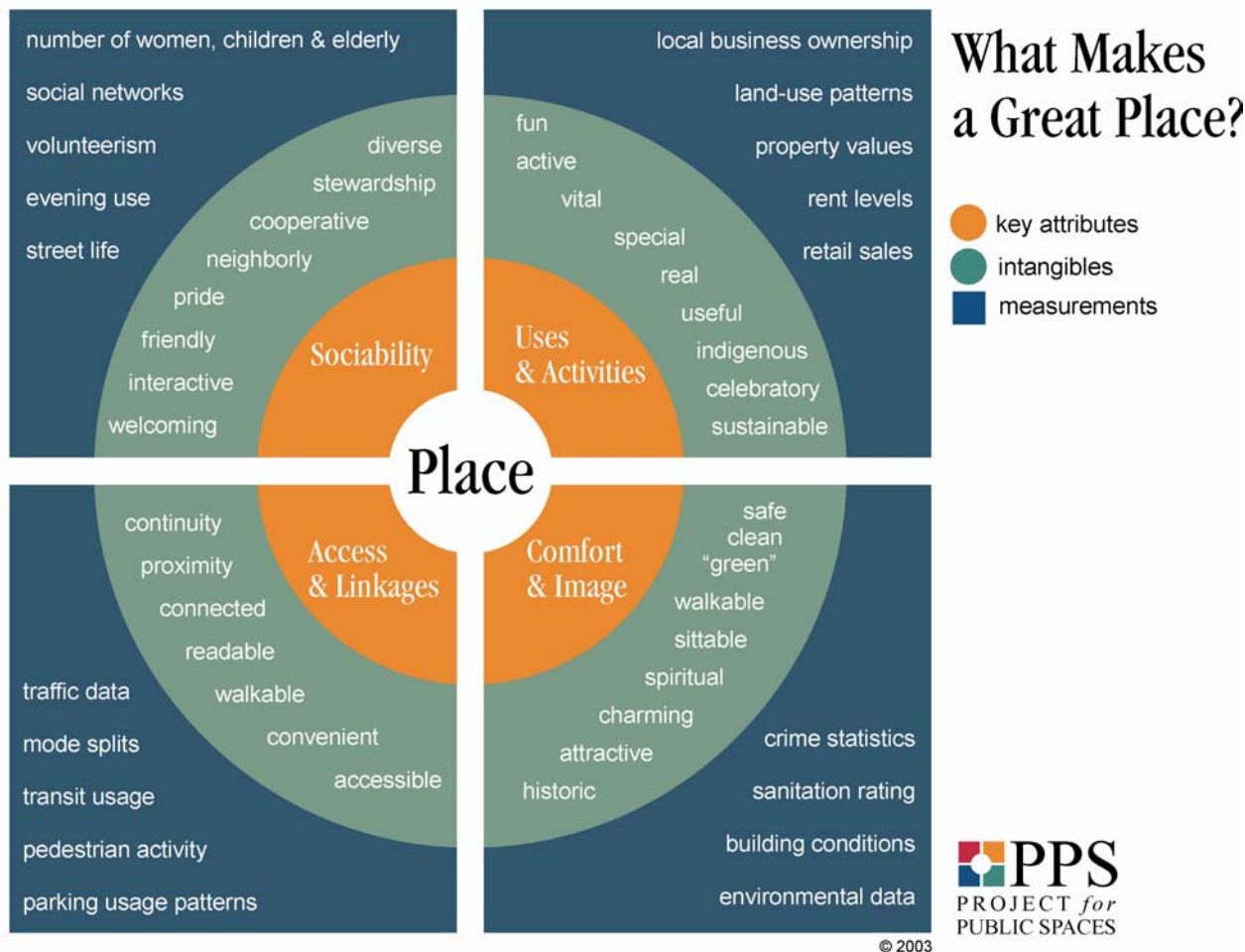
There is no need for a market sponsor to stop at one partnership, and indeed, most successful markets have several. Multiple partnerships only enhance the possibilities to broaden constituencies and share resources – in essence, to make the market more efficient, effective and sustainable.

## Building Places

For a community with few public spaces, a market can become its de-facto civic square – a place where people of diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds come not only to shop, but to meet, mingle and chat, and enjoy the overall atmosphere of the market. However, while this social atmosphere is an almost inherent quality of markets, it is often left to fend for itself in markets in low-income neighborhoods. Often this is due to a simple lack of resources, but sometimes it is because the market sponsors are focused exclusively on their mission. With the recent proliferation of farmers markets, organizers need to ensure that their market continues to be a draw beyond simply offering fresh and affordable produce. And, if food security is beginning to stabilize in these neighborhoods via the market itself and/or new supermarkets opening in the area, then the public space element of the market becomes increasingly important. Generally speaking, the nicer the place, the more money the farmers will make, the more sustainable the market will be.

Food systems advocates currently organizing a new market can choose a place with existing activity – and the space and potential for more – from the start, whether a park or small plaza, adjacent to a busy bus stop, community institution or retail shopping area.

Organizers can work to enhance both new and existing markets by looking at the four key elements of a great place that PPS uses in helping communities create vibrant public spaces. The Place Diagram below illustrates these four attributes, along with various indicators to gauge its success.



Improving these elements will help a market broaden its appeal and forge a strong identity – giving it a greater chance to remain competitive and grow in the future. For example:

- Access and linkages – Fondy’s pending new signage and artist-designed bus stop; improving parking; building off of existing retail, housing developments, or community institutions
- Comfort and image – providing seating and shelter for customers; using flowers to beautify the space
- Uses and activities – holding regular events in the form of music or other entertainment, cooking demos, cultural arts festivals
- Sociability – encouraging customers to bring family and friends to the market, expanding the customer base

Another way to do this is by exploring how to turn a market’s location into a more permanent and successful public space – a new civic square. The Broad Street market’s location, for example, is a public square waiting to happen – a beautiful, historic building in the center of a neighborhood, surrounded by a flexible, open space and long-standing community institutions. Other activities and programs throughout the day, week and year would help turn the spot into a



new civic square. Fondy's planned indoor market and incubator kitchen, too, has great potential to turn the marketplace into not just the culinary and economic center of the neighborhood, but the civic and social one as well. In the meantime, though, Fondy could advance its presence in the community by hosting regular antique or flea markets, or other programs and events, throughout the week.

By becoming better places, these markets will start to increase their spin-off benefits on their surrounding communities, making them safer for pedestrians, encouraging more investment, small-scale entrepreneurship, and local economic activity, and improving sociability and community-connectiveness, among other things. These spin-off effects, in turn, will draw larger numbers of customers to the market, helping it fulfill its mission of improving food security and building local food systems, allowing market vendors to flourish, and advancing the market's overall sustainability. On a more practical level, the management of a market and the management of a public square can be one and the same, with shared costs and diversified sources of income.

Ideally, local food systems are rooted in their communities, drawing from their assets and, in the end, returning multiple social and economic benefits to them. Through this research, we have seen that markets undertaken by community-based food system advocates, with much support, can successfully achieve this ideal. It is clear, though, that considerable work must be done to help these markets more effectively and expansively reach their goals and allow them to maintain success over the long term – for their sponsors, their vendors, and their communities.

# Appendices

A: GIS Maps of Market Trade Areas

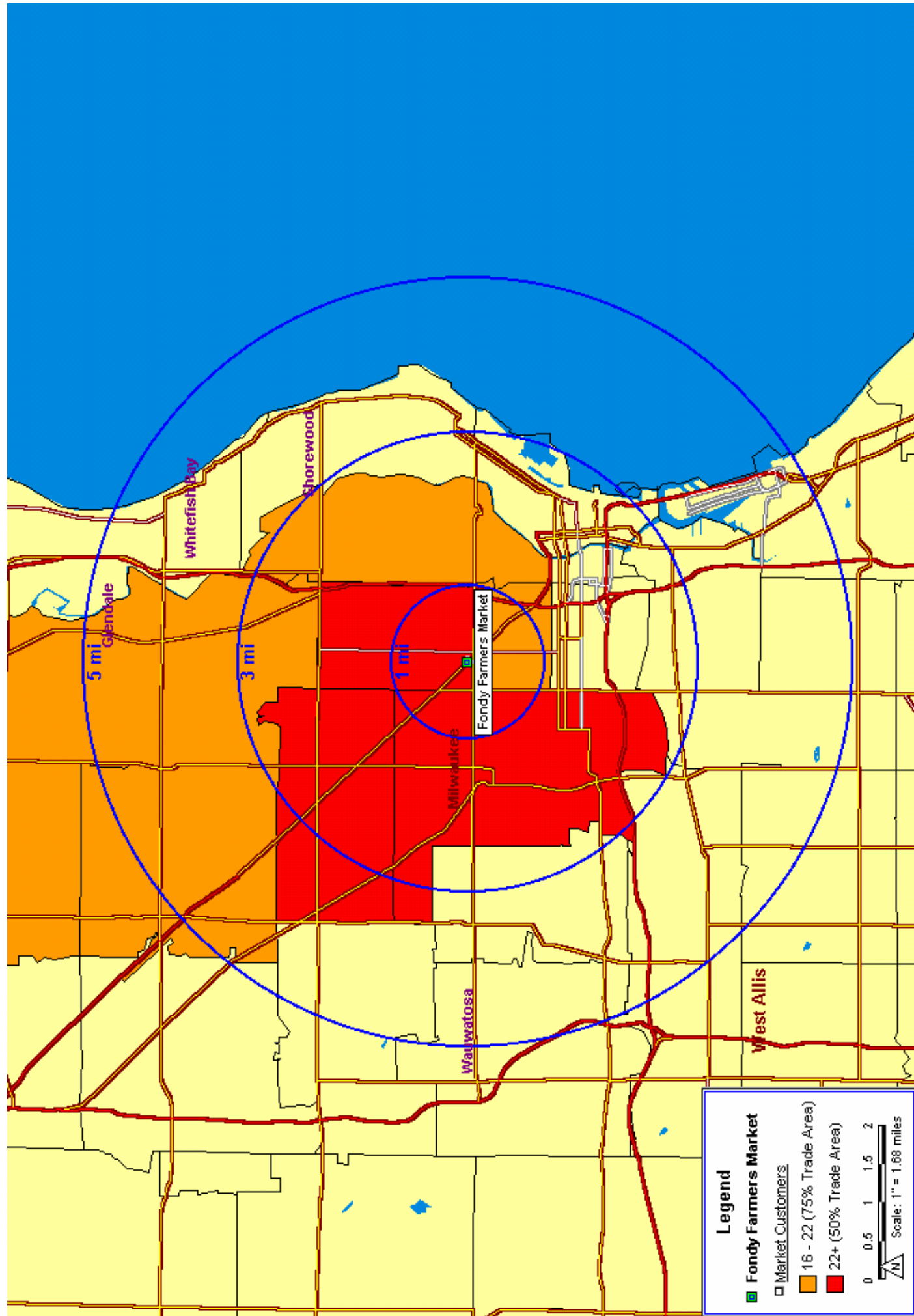
B: Bibliography/Sources Consulted

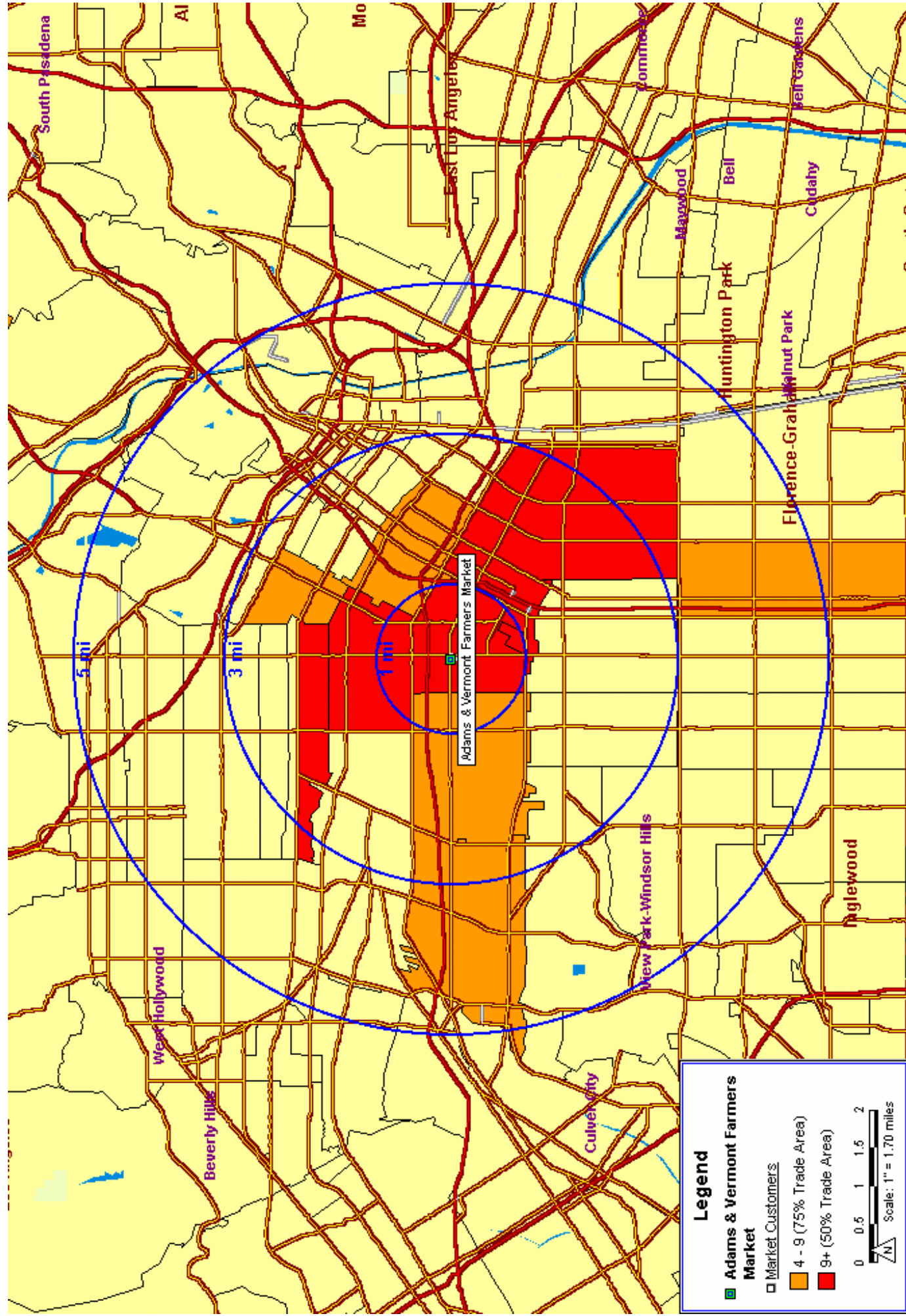


## APPENDIX A: GIS Maps of Market Trade Areas









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